

Kunsan's airpower deters enemy

By Capt. Chris Karns
8th Fighter Wing public affairs

If you ask the public what "Take the fight North" or America's Air Force is all about, they'll probably refer to fast, sleek jets or conjure up an image of Hollywood scripted "Tom Cruise-like" pilots.

Taking the fight north is more than fast, lethal airplanes. While pilots play the lead role in taking the fight north, they don't simply step to the jet and fly.

Just as the jet is a conglomeration of independent parts and systems – the engine makes it go, the hydraulics move the parts, electronics in the radar help the pilot see beyond one's natural eyesight – the people who help the pilots "take the fight north" are equally diversified. Turning the enemy into a quivering mass takes pilots, crew chiefs, weapons loaders, aircraft refuelers, the intelligence community, survival and life-support technicians, the airmen in mission planning cells and maintenance "back shops," plus countless others who also have a stake in the fight. It takes teamwork to get iron airborne and in position to break the enemy's toys.

"Take the fight north is a team sport," said Col. Tim Collins, 8th Operations Group commander. "It involves the (fuels airmen) making sure the airplane is properly fueled, making sure the weapons load crew has the right ordnance loaded properly so that when the pilot delivers the ordnance it comes off the jet and impacts the target the way we expect it to, and making sure the civil engineers are out there repairing our runway."

There are folks in the intel business helping us figure out the easiest way to get in and get out of a target area. We have people on the flightline, we have lots and lots of people in what we call "back shops" making sure all of the equipment that goes on the jet works properly. It takes a collective team effort



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jerry Morrison, 8th CS/VI

Wolf Pack F-16 Fighting Falcons fly in a four-ship formation recently. Kunsan's 80th and 35th Fighter Squadron's stand ready to "Take the Fight North" if necessary or to defend the Republic of Korea against any external aggression.

to put us in position to take out a target and return home safely. Every single one of us has a piece of taking the fight north, Collins explained.

Accomplishing the mission requires players to execute their assignments to perfection. However, this team sport is different than most. In football, if an offensive lineman blows a blocking assignment, it's a loss of yardage and possible lights out (in the form of a concussion) for the quarterback. However, if one of the members of the Kunsan war machine doesn't provide the pilot with a key piece of intelligence, incorrect weather briefs or if a weapons loader fails to load the bombs correctly, it could mean a misidentified target or possible lights out (death) for the pilot and jeopardize the mission and put countless others at risk. Often, the pilot doesn't have the luxury of running another play if an assignment is blown because rarely are there do-overs in this team sport.

Since execution is a must, safety is a

cornerstone of everything the Wolf Pack does in daily operations and during the Operational Readiness Inspection.

"We need to stay focused on the fundamentals, which means staying focused on safety," Collins said. "If people are being asked to do something that is dumb, different or dangerous, then they should stop what they are doing and reassess. We're not interested in putting anyone at risk unnecessarily. We need everyone ready for the fight. Combat safety should be at the forefront of everyone's mind out there when we are doing our job."

Combat safety involves technical compliance or following the written guidance on how to accomplish the mission, Collins said. It also involves checklist discipline or following the step-by-step procedures concerning how to get a job done. He also stressed using common sense and the need for those in leadership positions to provide their people with the right equipment and training to accomplish the mission.

No matter how diversified, when it comes to taking the fight north these professionals have one thing in common – a dedication to and pride in the mission that runs deep across this Pack.

"We're in charge of the jet," said Senior Airman Ryan Kelly, 80th Fighter Squadron crew chief. "We take care of all the forms, prep the jet for the pilots and take care of all the inspections after the jet flies. We fix anything that is mechanically wrong with the jet. It's one of the most important jobs in the Air Force. Without us the jet doesn't fly."

Similarly, the pilot doesn't step to the jet without the latest threat information.

"We have to continually update the mission planners on (potential) threats to the missions being planned," said Maj. Matthew MacKinnon, 8th Operations Support Squadron intelligence chief. "Once the mission packages are given to the fighter squadrons,

we give the fighter squadron intel guys (threat) information and they are ensuring the mission package is continually updated until a pilot steps in to fly the jet. We make sure they have the information to get through the threats, kill the target and make it safely back home."

The ORI is seen as just another challenge, and this team of professionals isn't about to back down. After all, taking the fight north is business as usual.

However, the way the Wolf Pack conducts the fight has changed since the last Inspector General team inspected Kunsan in May 2000. The current Kunsan team has faced and conquered many challenges to include protecting aircraft in the face of typhoons and floods; preparing Block-30 F-16 Fighting Falcons for departure and accepting and integrating the Block-40s, to give the Wolf Pack the ability to fight night or day, in all weather. The Wolf Pack has demonstrated flexibility in transitioning to an around-the-clock flying operation without any mishaps.

Every day the flightline transforms into a "fight line" where the Wolf Pack preps for the big fight by reviewing the enemy's strengths, vulnerabilities and determining the best course of action to defeat the enemy.

"On a daily basis, everything we do on the flightline is exactly what we'd do in wartime, except we're not in chem gear and nobody is bombing us," Collins said.

"We are trained and ready to fight. We'll show the IG our capabilities. We prepare America's airpower on demand. We don't know when they're going to ask for it, we don't know where they need it, but we're ready."

An 80th FS crew chief echoed Collins' statement.

"We're ready to go," Kelly said. "We know what's going on and we're all confident in our ability to get the job done."



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jerry Morrison, 8th CS/VI

Staff Sgt. Christian Homan, 80th Fighter Squadron crew chief, completes aircraft maintenance forms for his F-16 Fighting Falcon during January's readiness exercise here.